



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
UNITED STATES SENATOR

**TESTIMONY OF
UNITED STATES SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

FEBRUARY 23, 2016

I appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments on House Joint Resolution 25, a Resolution Recognizing Blue Water Navy Veterans. HJR 25 encouraged the United States Congress to restore the presumption of service connection for Agent Orange exposure to veterans who served in the coastal waters of Vietnam during the war.

The United States owes a debt of gratitude to the men and women who served, and serve, in our armed forces. These people preserve our freedoms and make our nation the strongest country in the world. Veterans deserve the highest quality health services and other forms of assistance to ensure that they are able to lead productive, healthy lives. This national responsibility is especially important in the area of exposure to Agent Orange and other chemicals

I strongly support S.681, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015 which would grant the same presumptions service-connected disability for veterans who were in the territorial seas of Vietnam as those who had boots on the ground. I am hopeful that this legislation will be approved by Congress – it is both fair and equitable to all veterans that we recognize the Agent Orange exposure of Blue Water Navy personnel.

While Congressional action is appropriate, current law allows the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, through administrative action, to extend the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to Blue Water Navy veterans. The Secretary recently used this authority to extend this presumption to the stateside aircrews who flew C-123 aircraft that had sprayed the herbicide in Vietnam. While I, along with 14 U.S. Senators, urged the Secretary to grant similar Agent Orange presumption to Blue Water Navy veterans, the Secretary declined to act.

Finally, more research on the broader issue of veteran exposure to toxic chemicals is desperately needed. I introduced the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 which establishes a National Center at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center for the research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving the Armed Forces. This bipartisan legislation has 35 cosponsors.

I greatly appreciate the concerns for our veterans as embodied in HJR 25 and am willing to continue to work with the members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs on this and other critical issues facing our veterans.

Thank you.